

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3514
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
AMEMBASSY DACCA
AMEMBASSY KABUL
AMCONSUL KARACHI
AMCONSUL LAHORE
AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY TEHRAN
CINCPAC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 ISLAMABAD 8623

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PK, PINT, PGOV
SUBJECT: BHUTTO AND HIS ELECTION OPTIONS

SUMMARY - THE PAKISTAN POLITICAL SCENE IS UNUSUALLY QUIET
AS THE THREE MAIN PROTAGONISTS, BHUTTO, THE PAKISTAN
NATIONAL ALLIANCE (PNA) AND THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION
(MLA), ASSESS HOW TO ACHIEVE THEIR AIMS. PNA AND MLA GOALS
ARE TO A LARGE DEGREE COMPLEMENTARY, YET THE KEY TO THE
CAMPAIGN RESTS WITH BHUTTO. AS HE CONSIDERS WHETHER TO
STICK TO HIS DECISION TO CONTEST, HE SEEMS STRONG ARGUMENTS
ON BOTH SIDES.

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HE KNOWS THE ONLY WAY TO ASSURE HIS POLITICAL AND PERSONAL
SECURITY IS TO CONTEST AND WIN. ALSO, THERE ARE PRESSURES
FROM WITHIN THE PARTY TO RUN. BHUTTO WAS PROBABLY
HEARTENED BY THE BOISTEROUS WELCOME HE RECEIVED IN SZRERAL
CITIES DURING THE PAST WEEKS, AND BHUTTO IS A GUT FIGHTER
WHO WOULD FIND IT PERSONALLY DIFFICULT TO RETREAT.

ON THE OTHER SIDE, IF BHUTTO IS CONVINCED HE CANNOT WIN, HE MAY WELL BOYCOTT, CLAIMING THE ELECTIONS ARE FIXED, AND THAT THE MASSES STILL SUPPORT HIM, HE KNOWS AN ELECTION WITHOUT PPP PARTICIPATION WILL HAVE ITS LEGITIMACY QUESTIONED BY MANY. HE MAY EVEN INSTIGATE DISRUPTIONS, HOPE FOR A CONTINUATION OF ARMY RULE AND PLAN TO RETURN ONE DAY TRIUMPHANTLY TO POWER.

MLA INVESTIGATIONS INTO MALPRACTICES OF THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT CONTINUE AND THE LEAKED RESULTS BECOME EVEN MORE LURID AND SPECTACULAR. PARTY WORKERS AND ORGANIZERS CONTINUE TO DEFECT, THE MEDIA IS BECOMING INCREASINGLY RECKLESS IN ITS ATTACKS ON BHUTTO, AND COURT CASES AGAINST THE FORMER PM CONTINUE TO BE FILED. AT THE MOMENT, THE PRESSURES WHICH WOULD EITHER LEAD OR FORCE BHUTTO TO NOT CONTEST ARE IN THE ASCENDANCY, BUT SITUATIONS CAN CHANGE QUICKLY IN PAKISTAN'S VOLATILE POLITICS.

END SUMMARY.

1. AS RAMAZAN THE HOLY MONTH OF FASTING BEGINS, AN UNNATURAL CALM PERVADES THE PAKISTAN POLITICAL LANDSCAPE. THE THREE MAJOR PROTAGONISTS IN THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN - BHUTTO, THE PAKISTAN NATIONAL ALLIANCE AND THE MARTIAL LAW ADMINISTRATION - WILL USE THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS TO ASSESS HOW BEST TO ACHIEVE THEIR AIMS. THE GOALS OF THE PNA AND THE MLA ARE, AT THE LEAST, COMPLEMENTARY.

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GENERAL ZIA WANTS AN ORDERLY AND OPEN CAMPAIGN CULMINATING IN A FREE AND FAIR ELECTION AND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A LEGITIMATE AND POPULAR CIVILIAN GOVERNMENT. THE PNA ALSO WANTS A QUIET CAMPAIGN PERIOD AND FAIR POLLS SINCE IT IS CONFIDENT OF VICTORY.

2. YET THE KEY TO THE NEXT TWO MONTHS AND THE COURSE OF THE CAMPAIGN REMAINS WITH THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER. HE HAS THE ABILITY AND POWER, AT THE LEAST TO DISRUPT THE ELECTION PROCESS, AND AT THE MOST, EVEN FORCE AN ELECTION POSTPONEMENT. AS BHUTTO WEIGHS WHETHER TO STAND BY HIS DECISION TO CONTEST THE ELECTIONS, HE UNDOUBTEDLY SEES STRONG ARGUMENTS ON BOTH SIDES OF THE QUESTION. HE REALIZES THAT THE ONLY SURE GUARANTEE OF HIS FUTURE POLITICAL AND PERSONAL SECURITY IS TO CONTEST AND WIN. PNA CONTACTS HAVE TOLD US THAT THEY FULLY EXPECT BHUTTO TO BE IN JAIL SOON AFTER ELECTIONS. WE DO NOT DOUBT THAT THERE IS ENOUGH EVIDENCE OF MALFEASANCE IN HIS ADMINISTRATION TO CONVICT HIM IN COURT. BHUTTO HIMSELF IS FAMILIAR ENOUGH WITH PAKISTANI POLITICAL PRACTICE TO REALIZE THAT THE POSSIBILITY OF REMAINING OUT OF DETENTION IN A PNA RULED PAKISTAN IS SLIGHT.

3. BHUTTO IS ALSO UNDER PRESSURE FROM IMPORTANT SEGMENTS IN THE PPP TO CONTEST. MOST NOTABLY, FORMER RELIGIOUS AFFAIRS MINISTER KAUSAR NIAZI AND FORMER PUNJAB GOVERNOR MUSTAFA KHAR HAVE PUSHED THIS OPTION. THEY HAVE ALSO IMPLICITLY THREATENED TO LEAD A RUMP PPP IN THE ELECTIONS IF BHUTTO BOYCOTTS. THE PARTY CHAIRMAN MUST ALSO HAVE BEEN BUOYED BY THE LARGE AND BOISTEROUS RECEPTIONS HE RECEIVED IN LAHORE AND PESHAWAR IN THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS. SUCH EVIDENCE OF SUPPORT, COMBINED WITH PARTY LOYALISTS WHO ARE TELLING BHUTTO HE HAS A WIDE FOLLOWING IN RURAL PUNJAB AND SIND, BOLSTER HIS RESOLVE TO CONTEST. FINALLY, BHUTTO IS A POLITICAL GUT FIGHTER AND THE DECISION TO RETREAT EVEN TEMPORARILY FROM THE ELECTION ARENA WOULD BE A CONFIDENTIAL

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DIFFICULT PERSONAL ONE.

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4. THERE ARE EQUALLY STRONG REASONS NOT TO CONTEST, HOWEVER, SOME OF WHICH ARE BECOMING INCREASINGLY IMPORTANT. IF BHUTTO BECOMES CONVINCED THAT FOR WHATEVER REASONS - MLA PARTIALITY, "FOREIGN INTERFERENCE" OR PPP WEAKNESS, - HE CANNOT WIN THE ELECTION, THEN IT IS IN HIS INTEREST TO BOYCOTT. IF HE CONTESTS AND LOSES WHAT IS GENERALLY VIEWED AS A FAIR ELECTION, HIS POLITICAL FUTURE IN PAKISTAN IS PROBABLY FINISHED. HOWEVER, IF HE KNOWS HE CANNOT WIN, AND THEREFORE BOYCOTTS CLAIMING THE ELECTIONS WILL NOT BE FAIR, HE CAN ALWAYS SAY AND BE BELIEVED IN SOME QUARTERS, THAT THE "MASSES" STILL SUPPORT HIM. BHUTTO KNOWS THAT ANY ELECTION WITHOUT PPP PARTICIPATION WILL ALWAYS HAVE ITS LEGITIMACY QUESTIONED BY MANY.
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5. IF BHUTTO SEES DEFEAT AS INEVITABLE, HE MAY ALSO DECIDE THAT THE BETTER COURSE IS TO BOYCOTT AND EVEN INSTIGATE DISRUPTIONS AND VIOLENCE IN THE HOPE THAT ELECTIONS WILL BE CANCELLED. ACCORDING TO THIS LINE OF REASONING, THE PEOPLE WILL SOON TIRE OF ARMY RULE, WILL REMEMBER THE BHUTTO DAYS FONDLY, AND BHUTTO WILL EMULATE PERON AND RETURN, EITHER FROM ABROAD OR DETENTION, TRIUMPHANT. SOME POLITICAL OBSERVERS CONTEND THAT ONE SCENARIO THAT MIGHT CAUSE BHUTTO TO RUN EVEN IF HE FORESEES LESS THAN A MAJORITY COULD BE HIS HOPE THAT HE WOULD WIN ENOUGH SEATS IN THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY TO BE ABLE TO BE A MEMBER OF, IF NOT PRIME MINISTER IN, A COALITION GOVERNMENT. THIS POSSIBILITY DEPENDS ON BHUTTO SPLITTING THE PNA COALITION AND ALLYING WITH SOME INFLUENTIAL PARTIES NOW IN THE PNA. IT IS NOT YET CLEAR TO US WHAT WEIGHT BHUTTO MIGHT GIVE TO THIS SCENARIO; THE PNA IS ADMITTEDLY FRAGILE, BUT HE REALIZES THAT FOR ANY SEGMENT OF IT TO JOIN HIM IN A COALITION WOULD BE AN EXTREME AND UNLIKELY MOVE.

6. THE FORCES THAT ENCOURAGE BHUTTO TO BOYCOTT ARE GAINING STRENGTH. THE MLA CONTINUES ITS NUMEROUS INVESTIGATIONS INTO THE MALPRACTICES OF THE PAST REGIME WITH THEIR CONCLUSIONS LEAKED DAILY TO THE PRESS BY THE LOWER LEVELS IN THE MLA. ALTHOUGH WE BELIEVE ZIA WANTS ELECTIONS HELD ON SCHEDULE WITH BOTH PPP AND PNA PARTICIPATION, THERE ARE THOSE IN THE MLA WHO WANT TO SEE BHUTTO ARRESTED AND TRIED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE AND WHO THEREFORE LEAK THE INVESTIGATION FINDINGS TO BUILD PRESSURE AGAINST THE FORMER PM.

7. THE MOST SPECTACULAR REVELATIONS IN THE INVESTIGATIONS

OF THE BHUTTO GOVERNMENT ARE YET TO COME. THE FORMER
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FEDERAL SECURITY FORCE CHIEF, MASOOD MAHMUD, IS SCHEDULED TO TESTIFY IN OPEN COURT ON AUGUST 27 ON WHY HE DETAINED OPPOSITION POLITICAL SUPPORTERS. MAHMUD HAS SAID HE HAS SEVERAL TAPE RECORDINGS OF CONVERSATIONS WITH BHUTTO AND HUNDREDS OF PAGES OF NOTES DETAILING THAT EVERYTHING HE DID WAS ON BHUTTO'S ORDERS.

8. AFTER THE FIRST SPATE OF MAJOR DEFECTIONS FROM THE PPP REPORTED IN ISLAMABAD 8438, A SLOW HEMORRHAGING FROM THE PARTY RANKS CONTINUES. INFLUENTIAL FAMILIES IN SIND, PROMINENT ORGANIZERS IN PUNJAB AND ADDITIONAL MINISTERS, SUCH AS CHEEMA AND ATAULLAH, WHO HAD WON THEIR SEATS IN MARCH THROUGH LARGE-SCALE RIGGING, HAVE LEFT THE PARTY. BHUTTO MUST BE DEEPLY TROUBLED AS HE CONSIDERS THE MASSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT HE NEEDS IN OCTOBER, AND THE CONTINUING DEFECTIONS FROM THE PARTY.

9. THE MLA DECLARATION THAT ALL THE MEDIA SHALL HAVE COMPLETE FREEDOM ALSO WORKS AGAINST THE PPP. SEVERAL URDU DAILIES, IN A UNIQUE KIND OF PAKISTANI INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM WHICH HIGHLIGHTS THE SPECTACULAR CHARGE AND IGNORES THE OBJECTIVE TRUTH, HAVE BEGUN WIDE-RANGING ATTACKS ON THE FORMER PRIME MINISTER. ALTHOUGH SEVERAL PPP PAPERS ARE GALLANTLY FIGHTING THE YELLOW JOURNALISM BATTLE AS WELL THEY ARE BADLY OUTGUNNED. FINALLY, THE NUMBER OF COURT CASES BROUGHT AGAINST BHUTTO CONTINUES TO RISE. ALTHOUGH WE DOUBT ANY WILL BE COMPLETED BEFORE THE ELECTION, THEIR NUISANCE VALUE IS CONSIDERABLE AND THE CHARGES RANGE FROM TREASON AND MURDER TO MISAPPROPRIATING FUNDS.

10. BHUTTO HAS SAID THAT IMMEDIATELY AFTER RAMAZAN (ENDING SEPTEMBER 16) HE WILL TOUR THE PUNJAB TO DETERMINE PPP STRENGTH. WE BELIEVE THE TOUR SHOULD GIVE THE FORMER PM SOME CONCLUSIVE EVIDENCE WHETHER WHAT HIS MINIONS ARE TELLING HIM - THAT HE HAS WIDE SUPPORT IN THE RURAL AREAS - IS TRUE. WE CANNOT PREDUCT WHICH WAY BHUTTO WILL DECIDE.
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AT THE MOMENT, THE PRESSURES FORCING HIM TO BOYCOTT SEEM TO BE IN THE ASCENDANCY. HOWEVER SITUATIONS CAN CHANGE QUICKLY IN PAKISTAN'S VOLATILE POLITICAL ARENA.
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